

MIGRATION REPORTS – DECEMBER 2015

DECEMBER 1, 2015



Straight from the Larry Likover's front doorsteps, the redheads have arrived in mass at Port O'Connor. Reports from the border of western Missouri and eastern Kansas are millions and millions of geese. Snow cover blankets all of Nebraska and Kansas. Oklahoma and the panhandle of Texas are also blanketed with snow. Freezing temperatures cover most of Kansas and extend down into Texas. The fair weather ducks are moving out of the Mid-west being replaced by mallards. Ladies and gentlemen if this does not push birds our way...nothing will.

DECEMBER 16, 2015

I was very bullish about the second half, but now some irresolution is settling in my blood. Rest assured we will shoot more birds than almost everyone else, but will they be limits, three-quarter limits, or half-limits on ducks? This has been a very off-season with a downright enigmatic migration. Regardless I will make an attempt to make sense out of what is going on with all those wings flapping around the country.

Middle Coast

The swath of rain that assaulted the middle coast in late October, scattering birds in the process, may now indeed be our friend. Many mid-coast wetlands including the coastal wildlife refuges received a much-needed rain, new ponds were formed and struggling wetlands were recharged. The Mad Island Refuge in Collegeport (just over the bay from OM) averaged 4.5 birds. That is outstanding for a public hunting area. Justin Hurst Refuge a little further to the east averaged 3.2, another very good showing of birds. Up to the north of us the Pierce Ranch (guided hunts) are doing well with guestimate of 85% of their hunters shooting limits on ducks, including a lot of bluewings. It appears our area is the "hot spot" for ducks. However, of concern is what is going on elsewhere and the weather, both elements that will have an unknown impact.

Lower Coast

The lower coast as a whole struggled on ducks this past weekend. Matagorda Island, a waterfowl haven had a high duck hunt of 4-birds per group. A few pintails and bluebills are around, but the vast majority are redheads and they are localized to certain areas. Quite simply ducks have not arrived in this area yet.

Upper Coast

J.D. Murphee Wildlife Refuge had a 2.5 bird average this past weekend with teal and gadwall being the most common ducks. McFaddin Wildlife Refuge along the coast reports an abundance of water and average success similar to Murphee. Anahuac Wildlife Refuge reported the area is flooded, duck numbers are low, and hunting success is poor. It appears rains and flooding have dispersed birds in the wildlife refuges along the Louisiana border.

East Texas

Heavy flooding and birds are scattered. However by finding a localized concentration of birds one can have an outstanding shoot.

Mid-west

There are still plenty of mourning doves in some areas in the Mid-west. Normally they have vacated the plains for Texas at this time of year. Snow geese are still stacked in various areas of the Mid-west. Kansas reports ducks have partially left the large bodies of water of the wildlife refuges and are scattered across farm ponds, normally frozen at this time of year. Redheads still sit on some of the big waters, another very unusual observation for this time of year.

Missouri

Ducks may now be peaking in Missouri as of the last report I received. Generally their largest concentrations of ducks occurs in the last week of November, similar to ours, but this year it appears they are peaking right now at 1.3 million birds (normally 0.7 million at this time of year). However, the same as many of our Texas ducks, the birds are scattered throughout the state due to flooding from rains and swollen rivers.

Arkansas

Arkansas reports that all of their waterfowl impoundments are flooded to capacity and subsequently birds are scattered. Per a report I received today from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's latest aerial waterfowl survey; the state's duck population is well below the

average and the lowest since 2009. Typically at this time of year there are 750,000 mallards in the waterfowl-rich area of the eastern part of the state, but this year the survey counted less than half the amount of mallards. The blame-game points the finger towards a strong El Niño weather pattern - remember in one of my previous newsletters I mentioned it would be a good idea to shoot El Niño, it still is. The high Christmas Day in Little Rock will be near 70 degrees and they are not alone.

Weather

Most of Kansas and Oklahoma are snow free, highs will be in the high 40's and low 50's not the best of conditions to push birds to the south. This Saturday's weather at Thunderbird calls for virtually no wind, not ideal. Next week whip out the clubs for 60-70 degree "birdy" chasing golf weather, not very Christmas-like at all.

In summary we have a stalled - perhaps 2-3 weeks, maybe longer - if not greatly dispersed migration of birds. Bluewings are filling straps, unheard in the middle of December. Balmy weather persists throughout the Central Flyway. Abundant water exists everywhere you look. The excessive water looked at another way: You have 200 people living in a town with one local café, filled to the brim with locals, along comes a McDonald's, Chick-fil-A, and Denny's, guess what? Your little old café is no longer wall-to wall. These are all indicators of tough duck hunting conditions, the likes of which we have not seen in over a decade.

Great habitat, an abundance of duck ponds, controlling the hunting pressure and disturbance on the ponds will all help insure we will have birds to shoot through the remainder of the year.



DECEMBER 21, 2015



Trickle-time, that is what is happening with the migration right now. Arkansas and Louisiana both report an influx of new birds. Not a massive migration, just a slow steady influx of new birds. I believe we have had the same recently, especially when it comes to greenwings and shovelers. A few more geese came down recently along with a nice push of cranes. Pintails are finally making an appearance in the bays. A good rain soaking will bring many of them inland looking for ephemeral sheet water.

Mallards are also on the move, but once again not in mass. Mallards are now the common duck across many wildlife management areas in the Mid-west.

Same old song, abundant water to the north, spring-like conditions from Texas up through the Mid-west, birds scattered and stalled. Yet we still are shooting birds, and a lot of them!

DECEMBER 29, 2015



The second significant weather system has finally arrived, balmy weather and bluewings no more - firewood burning, tall story time. There should be some type of major movement of birds, where is the big question. Snow blankets at least a third of Texas with some areas receiving over two feet of snow. Most of Oklahoma & Nebraska are completely snowbound, as well as 50% of Kansas and 75% of Missouri. Crops will be under a blanket of snow, should it freeze hard the geese and land-loving ducks will have to move on. Freezing temps can also be found across the same areas mentioned, meaning shallow wetlands are frozen, food sources are hidden below ice. Still extremely wet conditions exist in eastern half of Texas up through southern Arkansas meaning the birds have an awful lot of unfrozen habitat. Rivers are coming out of their banks meaning new food sources are being exposed for the ducks. I.e. More restaurants opened for dining ducks. Time will tell whether ducks head our way. Preliminary reports indicate ducks are the move and filling our ponds, but not in great numbers as earlier in the season. Birds are savvy, bring your best game plan to the hunt, it is no time to be lazy and hunt these birds like gullible early season bluewings.